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AUTHOR Lustberg, Mikey
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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains suggestions about the essential roles parents play in their children's learning and ideas about learning from New Jersey educators that enhance the parental role. The connection between parent involvement and children's success in school is a resource that needs to be expanded in many, or most, New Jersey schools. After a foreword by Executive Director Scott McVay, the following chapters are included: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Learning at Home: A Critical Key to Students' Success in School"; (3) "Parent Education Programs: 'In-Service for Parents'"; (4) "Parent Resource Centers, Booklets and Other Materials"; (5) "Helping with Homework"; (6) "Orientation for Parents"; and (7) "Collaboration." The ideas are illustrated with examples from programs that have been in New Jersey schools. Three resources for further information are listed. (SLD)

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Partnering with Parents to Foster Learning at Home

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Mikey Lustberg

Partnering with Parents to Foster Learning at Home

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Parents Play the Largest Role

Parents play the largest and most important role in shaping their children's sense of themselves and supporting them through the barrage of cultural and peer pressures that do so much to distract them from what is truly important: the kinds of people they are and the contributions they can make to family, friends and the world.

Jane E. Brody
The New York Times
November 11, 1997

Short of having Mikey Lustberg work with you directly, as a parent in the home, with her buoyant spirit confirming what you knew intuitively anyway about sparking the learning of your naturally curious students, you have here a distillation of her lifework as teacher, principal, parent, and now, can you believe it, a grandparent. She drew on several of her principal peers around the state to provide a ready reference, a point of view as well as practical ideas, for how the home can become a vibrant place for learning.

Our **"Parents-as-Partners in Education"** initiative was spurred by Lloyd Huck, one of our Trustees, who was impressed in 1994 by three summer opportunity award teachers (Vicki Pede of Phillipsburg Middle School and Cathy Gumlock and Lu Mintel of Union Township School in Hampton) who worked beautifully with parents to encourage their children's zest for learning. Dr. Mary Lee Fitzgerald gave the idea shape as we first inquired of principals statewide what they were doing with parents that they were proud of and would like to share. On one page. We in turn shared these responses and rewarded 25 with surprise mini-grants to build on some terrific beginnings.

We then made some larger grants to develop a fresh set of paradigms, and later honored eight projects of surpassing imagination and reach at an event in McCosh 50 on the Princeton campus on October 12, 1996 with, Richard W. Riley, the U.S. Secretary of Education, and Olympia Dukakis who played the principal in *Mr. Holland's Opus*. On that occasion, Secretary Riley said,

I tell you (principals, parents and teachers in the audience), you are not alone working to break down those old barriers that keep parents on the one side and principals and teachers on the other — I have been to so many schools — but I haven't heard any better examples (of parent-involvement programs) than I've heard here.

You should know, dear reader, that Dr. Mikey Lustberg is a quick study and often the first to get moving on things that count. The Principals' Center for the Garden State opened in September, 1994. Mary Lee Fitzgerald recalled nearly two years later the very day when the first principal signed up as a member (today the Center has 430 active members): "...in our early days at the Carnegie Foundation Jennifer made a daily dash downstairs to the mailroom to pick up the mail and came back crowing when she had an envelope in her hand. I can remember when there was none. The afternoon we got Mikey Lustberg's check as the very first paid member Jennifer was absolutely giddy with joy."

Partnering with Parents to Foster Learning at Home is the second of a series of occasional papers published by the Foundation. The first was by Roland Barth, **The Principal Learner, A Work in Progress**. Both of these little booklets are happily and wisely and piercingly illustrated by Harry Wilson, which will pull you in.

We hope this pamphlet will receive wide circulation. If you are planning a very special gathering, you should know that Dr. Lustberg is a willing, enthusiastic speaker. I should also note that this would not have seen the light of day without the encouraging support of my colleagues Robert Perry, a natural teacher and gentle guide, and Susan Pilshaw, who cares about principals and parents and children and was a good shepherd of the project every step of the way.

Scott McVay
Executive Director
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

May 24, 1998

INTRODUCTION

We know that there are many variables which affect students' love of learning and success in school. We also have enough practical and theoretical information to know that parental involvement as partners in their children's learning is a critical component. The profusion of research, books, studies, professional articles, symposia and media attention acknowledge this. Educators, parents and the public consider the partnership aspect of home and school a very high priority. The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation also recognizes the importance of this collaboration and has been supporting related endeavors through grants, programs and professional conferences. According to Scott McVay, Executive Director of the Dodge Foundation, "...the growing evidence suggests what we already intuit, namely that what happens in the home affects mightily what transpires in the school...parents' informed expectations have a large correlation with students' aspirations and achievements...." The Dodge "Parents-as-Partners in Education" program is helping educators and parents in New Jersey to network, share ideas and enrich their practices. These efforts, we hope, will assist schools to become "vibrant communities of learners — communities which include parents."

Twenty-five Dodge awards were given to principals and their staffs in 1995 in appreciation for sharing great ideas already accomplished. A "Parents-as-Partners" symposium was held October 26, 1995. Thirty grants were awarded in 1996 to further promote quality parent involvement. The Principals' Center for the Garden State, with support from the Dodge Foundation, has also sponsored workshops and programs to further this initiative. A second "Parents-as-Partners" gathering, October 12, 1996, continued the sharing of ideas and strategies to motivate and enhance partnerships.

This booklet is part of the process. It is one networking effort provided by the Dodge Foundation. The organization for this booklet is based on one topic, LEARNING AT HOME, from Dr. Joyce Epstein's framework of six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with community. **Many researchers and practitioners agree that what parents do at home to foster and support their children's learning is crucial.** The ideas and practices included in this booklet relate to this topic and have been collected from the principals who received awards in Dodge's 1995 Parents-as-Partners in Education initiative.

Special thanks to the Advisory Board for this project: Dr. Harry A. Galinsky, former Paramus Superintendent of Schools; Meryl Barrett, principal of Ridge Ranch School in Paramus; Linda Gross, principal of Sunnymead School in Hillsborough; and Arthur Sheninger, principal of Hatchery Hill School in Hackettstown.

Dr. Mikey Lustberg, Editor

LEARNING AT HOME

A CRITICAL KEY TO STUDENTS' SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Learning at Home, according to Dr. Joyce Epstein, (*School and Family Partnerships*, 1992) is involvement of families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities. This does not necessarily assume that all parents know how to become involved or how to initiate, participate in and monitor this kind of learning. The ideas here include efforts to help parents develop incentives and expertise, to provide support from school staff and leadership, and to raise parent awareness of the curriculum and teaching/learning strategies.

Successful partnership efforts shared by principals and their staffs are very ambitious, diversified, and creative. In reviewing these exciting endeavors, several common threads were identified as conditions for success: barriers need to come down so parents feel welcomed and respected; schools need to provide flexible times for conferences, meetings, workshops and other parent-staff interactions; home and school need to collaboratively create new solutions based on new perspectives; school personnel need to increase sensitivity towards parents' self-esteem and empowerment; family involvement, like the growth of children, needs a developmental approach; frequent parent/staff surveys are needed to help determine priorities; parents need to be an integral part of key partnership initiatives and to feel a sense of shared ownership.

According to a description of the ***Parents as Key Communicators,*** a project at the Euclid School in Hasbrouck Heights, "It is the school's obligation to reach out to parents by directly involving them in understanding what is being taught, specific curriculum expectations, and how the parents can help their children at home.... to continue to involve parents and the community in the learning process by creating a shared learning experience for all."

Dr. Epstein's research (1995) indicates that school-guided parent involvement at home improves student achievement, attitudes, homework, aspirations and report card grades. Surveys of parents show that most families want to encourage and guide their children but need more information and assistance from schools. "Of all the types of involvement the one that most parents want to know about is: **How do I help my own child at home**?" Although this request is at the top of parents' wish lists, it is also the hardest to make

happen because it requires teachers at all grade levels to continually communicate with families on *how* to assist learning at home.

It turns out that teacher efforts lead to improved student and parent attitudes towards school, more interaction between parents and children, and more reinforcement of teachers' goals for better schoolwork. This type of support from teachers also broadens parent involvement for the important

general skills (i.e., time management, study habits, building responsibility, social skills, personal hygiene), and towards equally important specific skills related to the children's class work (i.e., assisting children to review, complete or extend current curricular skills). Schools might strive to provide parents with learning opportunities such as awareness raising and skill development. The purpose would be to improve parents' ability to reinforce classroom instruction, tutor, and play learning games. Schools might want to provide parent workshops to increase awareness of the curriculum, philosophy, innovative teaching techniques and ways to encourage and guide children. Dr. Epstein suggests sixteen important ways to involve parents in learning activities at home, paraphrased as follows:

1. Ask parents to regularly read to their children and/or to listen to their children read aloud.

2. Lend books, workbooks and other materials to parents.

3. Ask parents to take their children to the library.

4. Ask parents to get their children to talk about what they did in class.

5. Give an assignment that requires the children to ask their parents questions.

6. Ask parents to view a specific television program with their children and discuss it.

7. Suggest ways for parents to include children in their own educationally enriching activities.

8. Send home suggestions for games or group activities related to school learning.

9. Suggest how parents might use home materials and activities to stimulate their children's interest in curricular subjects.

10. Establish agreements with parents to supervise and assist children in completing homework.

11. Help parents provide appropriate rewards and/or penalties based on school performance and/or behavior.

12. Ask parents to observe the classroom with particular attention to teacher strategies.

13. **Provide parents with hands-on learning to build their techniques for teaching, for making learning materials or for planning lessons**.

14. Give a questionnaire or other form of feedback to parents to help them evaluate their children's progress.

15. Ask parents to sign homework to ensure its completion.

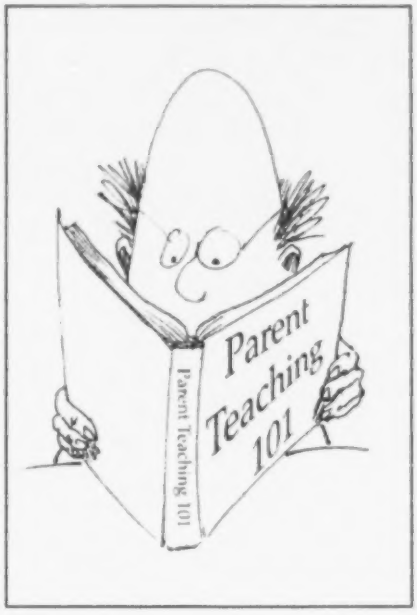
16. Ask parents to provide practice drills in spelling and math, and to help with workbook assignments without doing the work themselves.

Principals who responded to the Dodge Foundation inquiries shared great ideas on how to effectively and sensitively increase and improve parent involvement at home. We hope these practices will complement your already successful endeavors and will broaden horizons. In an effort to be concise, only representative and exemplary practices are described. Unfortunately, all contributions could not be included and cited in this first phase of Dodge sharing.

As a beginning you may want to read an article in The Education Digest, April 1993, *FOCUS: GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED,* by Ernest Palestis, Superintendent of Schools, Mine Hill, New Jersey. It is amazing how many ways this prize-winning district involved parents qualitatively. Its Canfield Avenue School programs have been recognized nationally and statewide and can be replicated or adapted. This article is a good introduction to the many other innovative approaches that follow.

PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS:
"In-Service for Parents"

Parents want to understand the goals of the educational program and they need to have information about the curriculum. They also need to know about the expectations and strategies of their children's teachers. Ross Danis, Principal of Clinton Public School, describes initiatives that address these needs. His school publishes "Curriculum at a Glance" in which learning outcomes are written in non-jargon language. They describe learning outcomes of every discipline and grade level. These short, easy-to-read booklets also give information on teachers' backgrounds and on key curricular events. In addition, this school offers a series of workshops entitled "The Parent Connection" informing parents about innovations such as whole language, critical thinking and writing process theory and instruction. Special meetings to help parents understand school goals are held. Parents are also encouraged to visit classrooms and watch teachers in action.



At the Princeton Friends School, evening discussion groups regarding books, themes or current teaching activities are held to encourage a community of learners among parents and teachers. Other discussion groups address parenting issues such as nutrition and child development. Still others offer in-depth descriptions and demonstrations related to the curriculum.

Many principals report parent participation on school improvement committees. For instance, Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School has a School Improvement Program in which parents meet to recommend building goals and subsequently help to implement these through various projects. Presentations to enlighten parents about instructional rationale and strategies also help them to become better teachers at home.

Family/children workshops are successful "training" activities reported by many principals. For instance, the Midtown Community School helps parents connect with school subjects through a variety of offerings such as Family Math, Family Science, Family Tools and Technology, Family Art and Family Puppetry. Families also attend curricular expos and fairs. Midtown also helps parents develop effective teaching techniques through instruction offered after school in a van which travels to neighborhoods in the district. Workshops have been conducted about reading, writing, math, social studies and homework tips. Principal Patricia McGeehan reports that this community school concept reaches out with both day and evening opportunities for adults in the community at large. Offered are courses and workshops in English as a Second Language and a parent education program (reading improvement, parenting skills, career choices, coping with teens). Also provided are workshops about homework, building self-esteem, positive discipline and computers.

At Nishuane School, parents and staff are engaged in "The Joy and Love of Reading Program" which provides parents with a philosophy, an approach, and practice reading to and with their children. Many principals report successful reading incentive programs which motivate and necessitate parental involvement at home.

To better accommodate parent needs, several schools offer parent education workshops in alternative locations closer to students' families and also at different times of the day and evening. The Children's Institute serves a wide geographic area and advocates flexible scheduling. Families' needs and interests are assessed and workshops are planned accordingly. Hands-on learning activities that parents can do with their child are popular offerings. Parents are encouraged to give workshops in their area of expertise. School staff provides training for these parents on how to plan and conduct their presentations.

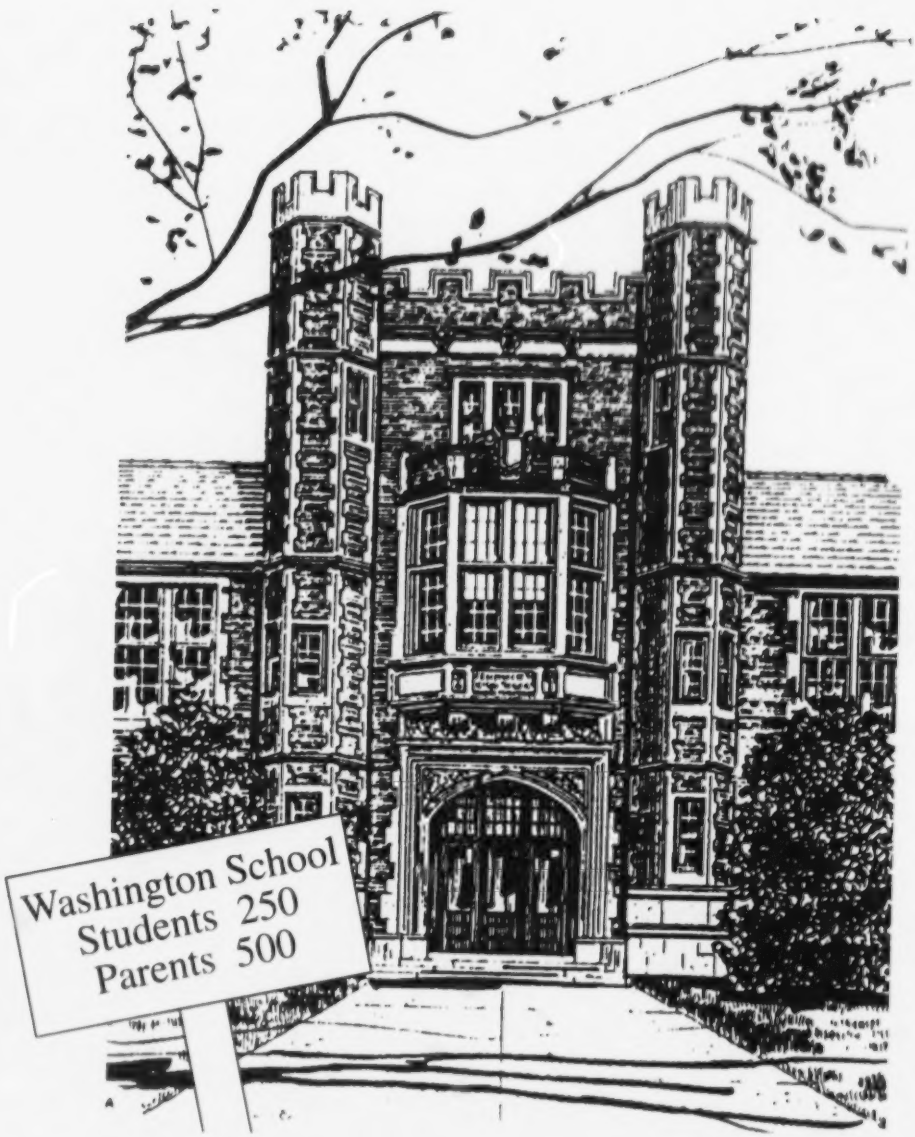
Parenting issues are always a high priority and are mentioned frequently as topics for general meetings and specific workshops. At Ridge Ranch School, ***Quest Skills for Growing,*** a prevention program, affords staff members an excellent medium to address parenting issues. At Memorial School, the staff, principal and parents work together each year to identify speakers who will make presentations on topics rel-

evant to parent and school needs. The format varies from general PTA meetings, small groups, brown bag lunches and American Education Week special programs. Speakers might be paid experts but often include staff members, curricular specialists, the Child Study Team or Central Office personnel. Ridge Ranch and Memorial School use StarLab, a mini-planetarium, to acquaint parents not only with astronomy, but how teachers integrate astronomy with mythology, writing, reading and social studies. Parents gain a good understanding and are better able to follow-up on this learning at home.

> *Parents in Education (PIE), a program at Freeman School, is an exemplary program to empower parents to function as primary educators of their children. PIE Days promote knowledge and skills in specific curricula. Different themes are selected monthly for "parent in-service." Parents receive instruction and a host of ideas for home learning activities. Substitute family members or other volunteers are recruited for students who have no family member able to attend a PIE Day, thus providing the services for every child in the school.*

The Sunnymead School proudly shares its motto, "We are a community of learners and leaders." Parents have an Academy for Continuing Education and suggest the preferred courses. Assisting parents in "learn-at-home" efforts is a school priority and the Academy is an important vehicle towards this goal. Principal Linda Gross recommends that principals read The 10th School by Don Davies, co-director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning. This article describes the one out of ten schools in which school-family-community partnerships flourish. "In a tenth school, learning does not stop at the schoolhouse door. The school helps families do what nearly all of them want to do anyway – increase their children's academic success... Teachers provide guidance on setting realistic expectations, monitoring and helping with homework, selecting appropriate books and learning materials, supporting the school's academic priorities and using home learning materials." Teachers (or groups of teachers in a school or district) can develop their own learn-at-home materials for parents. They can also provide commercially produced materials and those designed by other schools and districts.

The examples described above are but a limited selection of "dishes from our gourmet smorgasbord" of wonderful ideas. We hope that you will be able to use and adapt these in your school.



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PARENT RESOURCE CENTERS, BOOKLETS AND OTHER MATERIALS

This section will share successful learning-at-home efforts, ideas, techniques and strategies provided by some schools for their parents. Principals report using both commercially published and "homemade" resources. They are quite willing to share these with you. Pamphlets from organizations such as the New Jersey Education Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, the United States Department of Education and the National Education Association are frequently made available to parents at no cost. Topics are varied and can range from discipline to latchkey issues, from TV viewing to homework. Many other districts buy programs from various parent research centers.

Parent Resource Centers are frequently mentioned as an effective way to share books, videos, audio tapes, games, magazines and other resources. These are sometimes funded by boards of education, the Parent Teacher Association, or through grants and donations. At Memorial School, donations to the Parent Resource Center are made in honor of celebrations and other special events. Parents originally established a committee to work with the principal and staff members to preview and recommend purchases. The assortment includes resource materials on parenting, pedagogy, museum trips, arts and crafts, and places to visit in New Jersey, to mention a few. If speakers allow their presentations to be taped, these are added to the Parent Resource Center.

Memorial School lends "Books-in-a-Bag" and "Science-in-a-Box" kits

from its Parent Resource Center. Both of these projects are a collaborative effort of home and school, providing families with enjoyable learning activities at home. Hatchery Hill School also has book bags, "It's In The Bag," and, like Memorial's, these bags each contain a storybook, activity guide and materials. If parents cannot come into school to borrow the book kits, they can call the librarian who sends them home with the child.

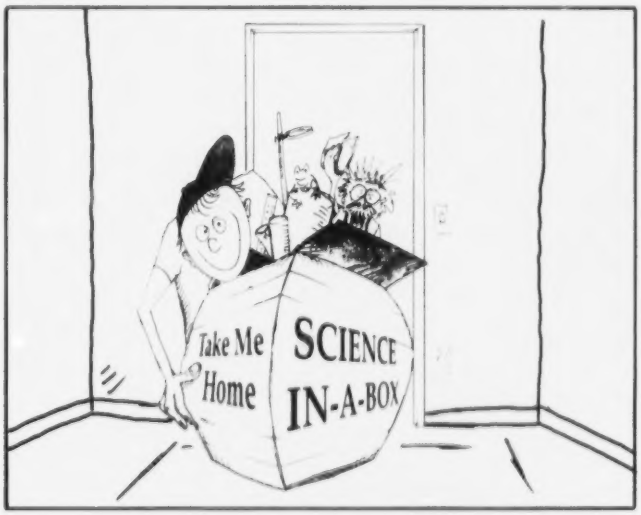
Resource centers can be located in school libraries, PTA rooms (where available), big closets, halls or wherever a bookcase or file cabinet can be located. Each school somehow makes room even when conditions become crowded. Parents from Princeton Friends School make excellent use of the center and continue to add books to their parent library. Canfield Avenue School is fortunate in that its parenting collection is provided by its board. Sunnymead School, with the help of the Home and School Association, has recently set up a lending library of resource materials for staff and parents. Hillcrest School is in the process of developing a Parent Help section to add to the school library with books, magazines, videos and other media which will focus on ways to help parents work with their children and better understand children's development.

The Parents Involved for Children's Success (P.I.C.S.),a committee in the Hackettstown School District, provides Appalachia Educational Laboratory's *FAMILY CONNECTIONS.* This is a colorful four-page publication filled with learning activities that families can do at home. Parents are surveyed each year to determine how they assess and use this publication. Principal Arthur Sheninger of Hatchery Hill School highly recommends other P.I.C.S. resources: *Home Learning Enablers,* Early Childhood Education Administration Institute; *Family Focus* from NAESP; *Active Parenting; Little Beginnings* from NAESP; and *Calendar of Home Activities* from Curriculum Associates. *Family Focus* shows parents how to use the newspaper as an inexpensive way to enrich children's learning. An extensive listing of other resources compiled by the librarian is available. Patrick Cawley of Freeman School sends weekly "Home Learning Activities"to families as one component of the PIE program described previously.

Many principals report using newsletters sent frequently to provide parents with valuable information related to helping their children learn at home. Some cull ideas from their teachers. Others attach articles from professional literature to their school or PTA newsletters. Principals often

share articles with colleagues inside and outside their districts. Innovative strategies and activities related to revised curricula are often popular with parents. Principals appreciate their many teachers who send home articles from professional publications. Summer booklets for families, carefully and creatively prepared by teachers, are very popular and effective. Teachers include original and/or commercial learning games, activities, book lists, puzzles and resource suggestions. Some teachers share ideas for family traveling and vacation projects. An idea for principals is to facilitate networking among faculty. This could be an in-service offering to encourage teachers to share worthwhile projects such as summer booklets.

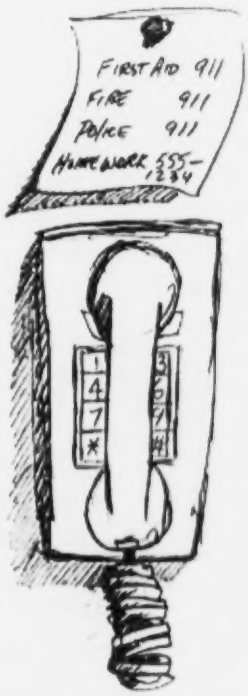
Principals reported and shared newsletter ideas from the following schools: Ridge Ranch, Sunnymead, Princeton Friends, Hatchery Hill, Freeman, Midtown Community School, Clinton Elementary, Adlai E. Stevenson, Memorial, Euclid, Byram Consolidated and Canfield. Probably most schools use this vehicle for addressing parent concerns and presenting information. Newsletters are also a very effective networking method for principals who can certainly add to their repertoire by exchanging these, along with handbooks and other resources. These exchanges can also take place at county meetings, The Principals' Center for the Garden State and at state and national conferences.



Parent Resource Centers

HELPING WITH HOMEWORK

Parents play a critical role in guiding and supporting their children's homework. Educators and social workers continually emphasize the importance of parents providing an appropriate place where children can work at home. Parents are asked to monitor homework time, to make sure students have an atmosphere conducive to studying, and to help their children organize their time and responsibilities. The role of the school is to give parents the support and encouragement to be good facilitators. Schools might wish to provide booklets, pamphlets and helpful hints related to homework. Parents can learn to ask appropriate questions. Teachers need to give captivating assignments which reinforce what has been taught and to stimulate parent-child interaction. Many schools accomplish these demanding duties through homework manuals, workshops, newsletters, speakers, and one-on-one tutoring from teachers and other staff.



A crucial parent responsibility is to help set up a realistic schedule. Most students have busy after-school involvements. Their parents might arrive home from work quite late in the day. Parents and their children need to work ***together*** as they plan the daily and weekly events. This helps them establish a schedule which allows enough time to get short and long term assignments completed. When children collaborate with parents on this important task, they usually acquire a sense of ownership and take more responsibility in adhering to the schedule. Homework-time nagging by parents can frequently be avoided by using this strategy.

The new technology has been a real boost to schools' efforts to be more supportive of parents. Many principals report great success with homework hotlines. Hillcrest School has a 24-hour hotline which enables parents to get homework information from teachers.

This system was funded by the PTO and cost $7,000. This full-time connection with the school is paying great dividends. Setting up homework hotlines may be expensive but this is a vital area. Schools sometimes succeed in getting funds from corporations and foundations to install hotlines. Trocki Hebrew Academy has a similar hotline to help parents secure homework assignments. At the Clinton Public School the "Learning Line" provides 24-hour access to every teacher in the school and weekly updates on what is being learned in every classroom. Principal Ross Danis reported in April of 1995 that 1,000 to 1,300 calls by parents are made each month. Obviously hotlines are popular and intensely used services.

The Hillcrest PTO, teachers and the principal designed the Homework Notebook which is printed and distributed annually. It provides a forum for parents and teachers to communicate daily and to be aware of homework assignments and needs. Parents sign the notebook each evening. Trocki Hebrew Academy also distributes homework assignment books so that parents can consistently check what is required each day.

Canfield School distributes instructions for parents through "Homework Without Tears." This format establishes a homework policy and helps parents design a home-learning environment. Parent "tip" sheets are provided with topics such as *Choose a Homework Drop Spot, Set Up a Study Area, Create a Homework Survival Kit, Schedule Daily Homework Time, Children Must Work on Their Own, Motivate Children with Praise* and *Use a Long-Range Planner.* This program also shares seven resource sheets with parents to help solve homework-related problems. Dr. Palestis reports a great reduction in the number of student detentions due to failure to do homework. He credits this program and the way in which it has been implemented for this encouraging outcome.

Several schools and individual teachers in schools use "Friday Folders." These are usually provided by the PTA's. Each Friday, student work, tests, curricular-related information, plans, special projects and other information are sent home in these folders to update parents on their children's progress. These updates also make parents aware of pertinent information which, in turn, helps them to adjust homework and learning-at-home activities.

Educators do give more than lip service to the concept of Parents-as-Partners. They are meeting the challenge to involve parents as a child's first teachers through in-service for both teachers and parents. This instruction helps to enhance the supervision and support of homework.

ORIENTATION FOR PARENTS

An assumption educators sometimes make is that families welcome the idea of having partnerships with schools. Participants at a conference held last spring at Columbia Teachers College revealed diverse perspectives on this topic. ***A New Understanding of Parent Involvement*** was the focus of this symposium. Presenters and audience were from different ends of the spectrum but all had one thing in common—the need to enhance partnerships between family, school and work for the benefit of our children. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley warned schools and businesses that they must do more to accommodate parents. "We ask families to twist and turn—to go through every possible contortion to fit into the structure and time needs of schools, businesses or other institutions—instead of the other way around. It is my very strong belief that we really must rethink what we are doing and how we use our time." A varied and sometimes hostile dichotomy of experiences was evident. Some participants questioned practices in schools where parents were not made welcome and were not included in decision-making. Some parents expressed frustrations with schools that want to keep parents "out of our hair." Carole Kennedy, President-Elect of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, suggested that educators who dictate the rules which see parents as a "pain" must move from "pain to partnership." She spoke of the "poverty of time" for parents to become involved in their children's education. Dr. Maxine Greene, professor at Teachers College, urged conference participants to raise their level of empathy. "The way we deal with children defines our civilization." She implored us to stop imposing our way of life on other cultures but rather to promote face-to-face communication, to walk in a new immigrant's shoes and to enable parents to become their best.

This leads us to the next category of parent involvement at home. The first impression parents have of their child's school is extremely important. If educators want parents to be partners, to feel welcome, to participate as first teachers, then a critical responsibility of the principal, staff and parent organization is to provide quality orientation programs. If feeling unwelcome is a barrier to effective parent involvement at home, we educators must develop a host of welcoming strategies.

What are some schools doing to

enhance orientation offerings? With input from staff and parents, many schools are rethinking their orientation programs. Surveys and feedback can provide insight and suggestions. The Hackettstown Elementary PTA conducts four visitations for students who will be entering kindergarten the following year. Sessions are about ninety minutes long and take place in kindergarten rooms during the day. These orientation sessions include mini-lessons taught by classroom and special area teachers. Parents are invited to the first and fourth sessions at which time they meet with the principal and other staff members.

As mentioned previously, these orientations are enhanced by using other resources such as NAESP's *LITTLE BEGINNINGS*. The pamphlet is distributed to new parents at the Hackettstown Hospital. A companion video has been donated to the hospital. A liaison links the school to the hospital's pre-natal and natal programs. *JUMP START* is yet another valuable orientation method which consists of a two-week summer program held prior to beginning school. There are ten sessions, each 150 minutes long. The goal is to prepare kindergarten students socially and academically, and to provide developmental screening. Finally, *FAMILY CONNECTIONS I AND II*, already described, are much appreciated guides for families of pre-school and kindergarten children. Fortunately these programs are funded by the district for a total of about $7,000. The PTA picks up the $200 tab for the Pre-Kindergarten Orientation.

Other schools with kindergartens report a range of activities:

- parent orientation programs held in the spring preceding the start of school;
- visitations in June of early childhood center students;
- visits the day before school begins so that children can see their room, meet the teacher and aide, get acquainted with classmates, and practice getting on and off a school bus.

In Paramus there are two kindergarten centers which provide this type of "get acquainted" program. The two other elementary schools which have no kindergartens schedule a first-grade orientation for their students. In both cases the PTA provides refreshments and acts as host, welcoming parents and students. Parents provide input as to the format.

Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School sponsors "A Get-Acquainted Evening" affording parents and students the opportunity to visit school to meet teachers, nurse, secretary and principal, and to become familiar with the facilities. Lawrenceville Elementary School invites parents and pre-kindergarten children to an Open House in the spring scheduled just after a parent orientation program. The parent program has a discussion guide covering twenty-five important issues to ensure that parents feel welcome and have a comprehensive introduction to the school.

At Clinton Public School new students and their parents attend "Newcomers" events led by the PTA. New students get a welcome reception by the principal and their new teachers, complete with juice and donuts. At Memorial School new students are invited to "Lunch with the Principal." They have an opportunity to interact, ask questions, feel part of a group, and make recommendations.

Most schools have newcomers who are non-English speaking. Special programs with interpreters and visual helps are offered to these families. ESL aides are frequently invited to teas, open houses and coffee klatches to assist the staff in reaching out.

Back-to-School Nights offer a terrific opportunity to welcome and orient parents. Many principals have reported major changes in delivering the warm welcome to the captive audience on this all important occasion. Several schools have made videos of the school, its people and its programs.

Before concluding, it should be said that invitations sent to families are special messages in themselves. Principals and parent leaders need to thoughtfully assess these to ensure that the intended warmth and welcome are contained within the invitation. Equally important is the ambiance at the orientation events, including the welcoming committee and the charisma and sincerity of the speakers. Because orientation and first impressions are so important, we all need to use new lenses. We need to remember our first steps inside a school. We need to think "out of the box" so as to embody new perspectives and solutions. If we can favorably impress parents from the very beginning, our partnership aspirations stand a good chance of thriving.

COLLABORATION

WHO?
WHAT?
WHEN?
WHERE?
WHY?
HOW?

Introductory remarks mention a necessary ingredient for partnership efforts to be credible. Parents need to *feel* like partners! They need to be part of decision-making processes. This translates into soul-searching, into determining appropriate (and inappropriate) arenas for collaboration. This translates into developing parameters and guidelines. The process varies from school to school and from district to district. As suggested earlier, barriers need to come down and parents need to feel a real sense of respect and empowerment. They need to feel a sense of shared ownership. The principal and staff need to feel professional, ready to share some turf, *as long as the children emerge as the winners.* If educators want to improve parent involvement at home, they must first involve them in appropriate collaboration and decision-making at school.

Establishing a building advisory committee is essential, according to many principals. Principals report using parent collaboration committees to set goals and objectives and to review process and progress. There is also a need to form ad hoc committees for specific activities, investigations and projects. Built into the design of these committees is collaboration—on the idea that parents and staff members working together are the players. Principals participate as needed. For example, Adlai E. Stevenson School has many collaborative committees composed of teachers, parents and administrator to clarify educational goals and district philosophy.

When Euclid School created a Parent Curriculum Handbook to serve as a comprehensive guide for parents, the teachers and principal developed it but the parents reviewed and critiqued it. The handbook defines philosophy, goals and objectives, units of study and student outcomes. This handbook is a great help to parents as they guide and supervise homework. Parents and teachers at Memorial School collaborated to write the Parent

Handbook. The topics were decided by parents, and together with a staff committee, they wrote and published the book. For the first several years parents and staff were asked to critique the book and it was revised accordingly. As previously noted, a collaborative effort by teachers, principal and parents designed the Hillcrest Homework Notebook. The input from all gave a sense of ownership to all. Since everyone had a stake in creating it, everyone also had a stake in its success. It worked!

Linda Gross is especially proud of the collaborative effort of students, teachers, parents and community members in creating a beautiful instructional garden from a barren interior courtyard. It opened up lots of opportunities for families to interact at home, discussing the project and relating it to their own home environments. All of Hillsborough's schools were invited to the Parent Academy for Continuing Education (PACE) initiated by Linda Gross and Natalie Lewis. Parents helped to design the offerings of the academy which focused on current educational theories and practices.

At Freeman School three teachers initially developed the Parents-In-Education (P I E) program to integrate the school, home and community. Parents participate on the site team of the PIE committee. This committee plans the monthly themes and the PIE Days. Parents return to a school environment, participating in lessons with their children and attending adult lectures. Principal Patrick Cawley also reports that parents and teachers collaborate on a Super Supper and Curriculum Show at which the tables are reversed—the staff feeds the families! Most important is that children see first hand that their parents and teachers are partners for them!

The Parents Involved for Children's Success (PICS) committee in Hackettstown involves teachers and principals in their initiatives. Parents accept responsibility for implementing the many pre-school and kindergarten activities and for funding several of their ideas. They confer with the professional staff regarding the selection of media for the parent library and for the many publications distributed to families. Teachers work closely with parents to support the PICS efforts and to make this important partnership work.

Parents collaborate with teachers at the Consolidated/Intermediate Schools in a publishing program. As students write stories, parents work closely with teachers to type and bind them. Principal Arlene Lefar notices an increase in comradery as a result of this project. This involvement spills over to home interaction and enthusiasm.

At Washington School, Principal Mary Mysliwiec successfully involves parents in many collaborative efforts. Parents work with the staff to organize and present an International Fair. This endeavor brings together families from many ethnic groups and fosters new friendships. Parents have taken over two school initiatives, the Self Esteem Program and the Principal's Reading Challenge, both of which involve follow-through at home.

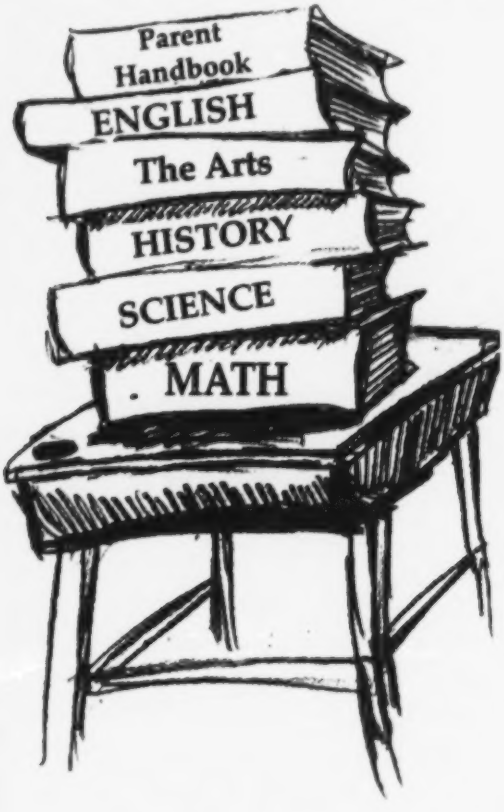
Irwin Figman, principal of Hillside Avenue School, expressed a collaborative effort glowingly: "Their (the parents) commitment to making this project a success helped the teachers to reaffirm their beliefs that parents in the school are a necessary part of making our schools the best they can be. Seeing both parents and teachers working together helped the children to be sure of the level of commitment and caring that both parties have for them. School became a central focus for their lives, not a separate entity to be thought of from nine to three. They and their families are a part of our family." Figman was referring to the collaboration at Hillside of a community-based Earth Day Fair to promote environmental awareness.

The Woodland School "family" is proud of its parent-teacher-school network regarding two important projects. Staff and parents work together in a publishing center to enable every one of the 350 students to publish a book. The second collaborative effort involves the training of a cadre of parents who work with students on technology. Parents work directly with students. They also involve the community by obtaining grants and volunteers. Although both of these projects take place in school, there is a positive flow into family life at home.

Principals report that surveys play a significant function in identifying priorities, feedback, foci, suggestions and recommendations. Parents from Adlai E. Stevenson

School, along with community members, completed an opinion survey for the Fairfield School District to help set priorities and planning. Midtown Community School conducts interviews with parents to get new ideas on how to improve. The Children's Institute offers parent workshops based on the results of a survey assessing families' needs and interests.

Parents and teachers at Ridge Ranch collaborate on the planning, implementation and maintenance of many special activities and innovative projects. Each year the staff, parents and principal select a theme and together plan extensively to integrate learning around this theme, culminating in an end-of-the-year convocation. Throughout the year parents reinforce at home the learning related to this theme.



Parents are involved in a continual review process at Nishuane School to address goals and objectives. They work closely with teachers to support curriculum development through the integration of special programs with classroom learning. Parents also collaborate with school staff by planning and implementing a partnership with community groups and churches for the specific purpose of providing adult male role models for the students.

As reported by so many principals, schools and school districts are making more and improved efforts to involve parents as decision-makers. According to Ernest Palestis, "They help set our annual goals and district objectives... they serve on our teacher recognition committee and on such advisory committees as Basic Skills Improvement, kindergarten, special

education, enrichment, and budgeting." Mine Hill uses the *Parents on Your Side: A Comprehensive Parent Involvement Program for Teachers*, to formally train teachers to work comfortably with parents and to view parents as resources and partners. Most colleges of education offer little or no course work related to parent relations and involvement of parents. It, therefore, becomes the responsibility of practitioners to fill this void.

> *Parents at the Princeton Friends School serve on many sub-committees dealing with issues such as diversity in the community, technology in the school, and long range planning. The more parents are involved in decision-making at school, the more they support learning at home.*

The list of dedicated efforts and risk-taking collaborations goes on and on. The main focus for educators and families is that we can and must work together for the benefit of our children.

Postscript

Parents in New Jersey do, indeed, accomplish more for children than just bake cakes! This booklet is filled with suggestions regarding the essential roles parents play in their children's learning and with ideas from educator colleagues around the Garden State that enhance that critical work. The collaborations between family, school and community are intensely worthy of being shared. It hardly need be stated that the connection between parent involvement and their children's success in school is a resource requiring major expansion in many, perhaps most, New Jersey schools.

This booklet is intended to share the integrated strategies for making schools vibrant communities of learners — communities which include parents on behalf of their children's education. The preceding pages of this booklet contain synopses from just a small percentage of those schools who received awards in the Dodge Foundation Parents-as-Partners in Education initiative. Many other schools were involved but these are the ones that responded to the question: How do schools encourage parents to help their children learn at home?

Thirty schools received grants in January 1996 which helped fund a range of successful endeavors: parent learn-a-thons, workshops, parent days, gatherings of community and school people, round-table discussions, parents' courses, and a parents academy. Topics (as well as formats) were varied and a partial list includes technology, communication, character education, reading, math, parents as classroom partners, parents as tutors, grandparents and senior citizens as mentors, test-taking strategies, single parents, gifted and talented, attention deficit disorders, parenting skills, parents as peer mediators, techniques for parents regarding homework assistance, and the school as a community center.

We commend these good examples to your review, and most especially, to their use.

Mikey Lustberg

Dr. Mikey Lustberg, Editor

Resources:

1. "School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share" by Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, Co-Director Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD; published in the May 1995 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* and May 1998 issue of *Basic Education*.

2. "Prize-Winning Parent Involvement in New Jersey" by Dr. Ernest Palestis, Superintendent of Schools in Mine Hill, New Jersey; published in April 1993 issue of *The Education Digest*.

3. For more information about New Jersey principals and/or their programs, contact:

Dr. Carol C. Wilson, Executive Director
Principals' Center for the Garden State
195 Nassau Street, Suite 12
Princeton, NJ 08542
(609) 497-1907,
www.princtr.org
princtr@idt.net

Dr. Mikey Lustberg, Editor
Partnering with Parents to Foster Learning at Home
20 Deerfield Lane
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458
(201) 327-8682

Scott McVay, Executive Director
Robert Perry, Program Officer
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation
P.O. Box 1239
Morristown, NJ 07962-1239
(973) 540-8442, (973) 540-1211 FAX

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